

dayroom to be picked up. Then we were marched to the R.R. station where we had two roll calls, after which, to our amazement and disgust, we were marched right back to a Provisional Squadron on the base and assigned to another barracks!! This sort of Army nonsense defies any and all reason or logic and one learns quickly not to ask why. So we drew bedding again, unpacked our bags and had supper followed by Retreat. I did learn one thing from this foolish exercise; my shipping orders indicated that I had been assigned to a new unit, the 451st Heavy Bombardment Group, which was formed in Tucson in May.

I pulled K.P. again on the 21st - this time in the Base Exchange. Even though I worked on pots and pans it was a fairly good day, as I could make myself as many chocolate malts as I wanted and the meals were better than in the mess hall. I even got off early enough to go into Salt Lake City to look it over and go to a movie. On the next day, without any warning, I was again roused out at 0300 to go on K.P. in the Squadron mess. That day was much rougher as we had a couple of the worst "pushers" I had ever encountered. A "pusher" was a soldier, usually a Corporal, with a I.Q. of about 29 who spent his time in the mess overseeing the work of K.P.'s and pushing them to get the work done. I always thought it unfortunate that Hitler didn't choose to exterminate K.P. "Pushers" rather than innocent Jews.

On Saturday the 24th I came down with my first bad case of Army diarrhea, commonly called the G.I. shits or more simply, the G.I.'s. This was fairly common in the Army in spite of the fact that its cause was well known - improperly washed cooking or eating utensils. It was not funny - it usually just knocked a person out for about 24 hours. It started with gas on the stomach which had the sensation of rotten eggs and proceeded from there. Fortunately, the Army medics had some pills which would quickly stop it and after going on sick call I was feeling better by evening. Those of us who were assigned to the 451st Bomb Group were again placed on shipping alert that day.

There seemed to be no escape from it - on Sunday night I was again put on K.P. in the Base Exchange - but at least it was better than in the regular mess hall. On Monday morning, 26 July, those of us in the 451st were told that we would ship out at 1630 that day. I expected another fiasco, but at the appointed hour we loaded into a bunch of 6 X 6 Army trucks and moved out in a long convoy at 1730. We had been told that we were going to Wendover Field in Utah, a distance of 125 miles. We passed along the Great Salt Lake and then across a bleak and desolate desert. It was like a moonscape. We arrived at Wendover at 2300 and were assigned to a tent area where large pyramidal six-man tents were already erected. We threw our blankets on the canvas cots which were already in the tent, unpacked some of our gear and wearily went to sleep.

ASSIGNMENT: 451st BOMB GROUP (H)

The following morning I learned that I had been assigned to the 726th Squadron and since I had no duty that day I spent my time organizing my gear and looking around the field. Wendover was a desolate place - located in the desert close to the Utah/Nevada state line. There were several large hangars on the field, some support buildings and the usual PX, Service Club, and base theater. There were barracks for the officers but all enlisted men lived in pyramidal tents. I had my first close look at a B-24 on the line that day. I was mildly disappointed to be assigned to a Heavy Bombardment Group, as I had always sort of wanted to be in a Fighter Group. And if it had to be bombers, I would probably have preferred B-17s at that point in time. B-24s were not especially glamorous in appearance and looked a bit awkward on the ground - they just didn't have the aura of a "Flying Fortress". But, like pelicans, though looking clumsy on the ground, B-24s were a thing of beauty in the air and I very quickly came to love them.

Our first duty was to construct frames and erect tents for our armament shop and equipment storage and to build work benches and storage racks. I quickly became a fair carpenter, if not a cabinet maker. We also constructed firing ranges for pistol and sub-machine gun use. It was very hot and dry at Wendover with wind-blown sand which seeped into everything. Strangely, though, we had a real gully-washer rain on 6 August which flooded all the tents and soaked most of our gear which had been left on the ground.

We were on a two-shift work schedule and I was assigned to "B" shift, from 1600 to 2400. Our planes were D and E models, with manually-operated, flexible nose guns (no turret), designated for training. Usually they were parked in a row on the ramp where we worked on them in the open. When the weather was very bad or when major work, such as engine changes or structural repair, was necessary a plane would be moved into one of the huge hangars, where two aircraft could be serviced at one time. I was intrigued by a strange design feature of these hangars. In addition to the two great sliding doors which were opened to admit aircraft, there were two other smaller sliding doors in the top center of the hangar which extended from the top of the regular doors almost to the roof-line. This would make a large opening like an inverted T, the purpose of which puzzled me. I thought the extra doors might be to clear the vertical tail fin of a very large plane, but there was no plane that large - or so I thought at the time. About a year later I realized that my guess had been correct, after all. Wendover Field had been planned especially as a training base for B-29 Groups, and those extra hangar doors were to clear the tail fins of B-29s. It was at Wendover Field that the 509th Composite Group, which dropped the two nuclear bombs on Japan, had completed its secret training prior to its fateful assignment at Tinian. Apparently the 451st Bomb Group had been sent there to make use of the facility before the B-29s arrived.

While at Wendover I spent a week in Driver's School, learning to drive heavy vehicles and afterwards was licensed to drive anything from a Jeep to heavy 6 X 6 cargo trucks. Since I had driven a lot at home, it came rather easily to me except for learning to double-clutch the non-synchro transmissions of the heavy vehicles. In one exercise we mired a heavy truck to its axles in a salt marsh and then extricated it with powered winches.

Most of our armament work consisted of cleaning and adjusting machine guns for aerial gunnery practice and loading "Blue Screammers" for bombing practice. Blue Screammers were practice bombs made of light weight sheet metal and filled with sand to weigh about 100 pounds. A small black powder charge was placed in the nose to make it easier to observe and score hits on the desert target range. The air crews flew almost every day on some sort of practice mission and we were kept busy keeping all the guns and bombing gear in order.

In addition to our regular work periods, we also had drills, took calisthenics, did detail work and received overseas shots for typhus and cholera.

On 10 August our Armament Officer, Lt. Luhrs, called us together to tell us he had orders to start sending everyone on short furloughs, prior to our expected overseas duty. My name was on the first list of eight to go and I left for home the next day, via bus to Salt Lake City. There, on the morning of the 12th, I left for the east via the train. At first I was on a very nice air-conditioned car, The Challenger, but was later transferred to an old, dirty day coach. By the time I arrived in Chicago the morning of the 14th, I was so tired of the train that I went to the airport and caught a United Airlines DC-3 for Cleveland. There I bought a new set of khakis, as mine were filthy from the train. I went to my Aunt Esther's and really surprised her! I called home to let Mother and Dad know where I was and the next day they met us at Bedford, where I visited with my Uncle Purdy and Aunt Dora and my cousin Dick.

After visiting all my relatives in northern Ohio we drove home where our Fox Terrier, Jerry, was overjoyed to see me again. The short furlough passed swiftly. Mother outdid herself to make all my favorite meals and deserts and I went to visit relatives, high school teachers and other friends. We went on picnics and went fishing in Piedmont Lake, but all too soon it was time to return to duty. On 21 August Mother and I caught the train at Flushing for Cleveland, where we spent the night at Essie's. My plane left at 0245 the next morning and I had to catch the limousine to the airport about midnight. My flight route was via Chicago, Des Moines, Omaha and Cheyenne to Salt Lake City where I caught a bus for Wendover, arriving at 2030 on the 22nd. My Squadron had in the meantime moved to a new area and I had a long way to walk after drawing my gear from Supply.

I found that we were now working three shifts a day and as luck would have it I ended up on "C" shift - 2000 to 0800. Shortly after I returned, I developed a very painful spot on my chin and went on sick call on the 27th to have the Doc check it. He took one look and immediately assigned me to the hospital where they put me on sulfa-

thiozol tablets. They also gave me a series of three X-ray treatments for reasons I never understood. It was apparently a serious local infection, possibly caused by an ingrown hair or a shaving nick - the Doctor really didn't know for sure. For a few days it was so painful that I could hardly eat. After it started to drain it began to feel better but it was slow to heal - I was to be in the hospital for two weeks. While I was there I had to attend a "school", along with every other ambulatory patient. It was incredibly silly - one day they actually had a lecture on how to add numbers. Another Army fiasco which defied all logic and reason!

In early September I began to hear rumors that our Group was about to move to a new base. On the 6th and 7th I received day passes from the hospital to return to my Squadron to get my gear organized and partially packed. I was so glad to get out of that hospital that I actually volunteered to work on the line a few hours on the 7th. On 10 September I was released from the hospital and that same night we loaded some of our gear and equipment on trucks. The following day we loaded up the rest of our gear, changed to dress uniforms and entrained on Pullmans at 1945. Enroute each man was required to sign his Last Will and Testament - apparently the Army meant business!. We arrived at Fairmont, Nebraska at 1330 on 13 September, where a truck convoy took us to Fairmont Air Force Base, about six miles away. Upon arrival we drew bedding, a comforter and footlocker, were assigned to a barracks, and then some of us returned to the R.R. Station to load the remaining bags and equipment on trucks.

This base was brand new - we were the first Group to arrive for training and all the facilities were in fine shape. Our barracks were the usual wood-framed, tarpaper-covered single story structures, so clean and new that we did not have to go through the usual clean up and scrub down detail. On the line our Armament Section shared a hangar with the 727th Squadron but there was lots of room. We started off with two nine hour shifts and again I got the "B" shift, from 1600 to 0100. The work remained about the same for a while - loading guns, loading Blue Screammers, doing required hardware modifications, etc. I spent a lot of time reading technical orders (T.O.s) on the power turrets so that I could do my own turret work without having to turn it over to a power turret specialist. Before long I knew about all there was to know about servicing, repairing and adjusting turrets and gunsights. It was a lot more challenging than just working on machine guns. On the night shift we also had the job of painting the tips of the target ammunition different colors for each aircraft. This was so that after a gunnery mission, in which the gunners fired at a target sleeve towed by another plane, the gunners' scores could be tallied up more easily.

Increasingly, we also had the job of cleaning small arms, such as the Cal. 45 automatic pistols and Browning automatic shotguns, which were used on training ranges by the aircrews. And there were the inevitable lectures and training films on all sorts of subjects, primarily related to overseas duty. Our Squadron Commander, Captain Charles Haltom, spoke to us on several occasions.

Once every ten days or so we would receive a 24 hour pass. I usually spent my passes on the base getting caught up with personal things,

going to the Service Club and Base Theater, or just reading in the barracks. On two occasions, however, I did take a pass off base. On 20 September I hitched a ride into Lincoln where I went to a very nice U.S.O. and from there phoned home after waiting about three hours to get a line. I caught a bus back to the base, but for some reason it was very late and I had to wait five hours at the station. It finally left at 0300 and then dropped me off on the highway at a point from which I had to walk six miles to the base. I was afraid I might end up A.W.O.L. but I finally got to my barracks at 0700 and hit the sack. Two hours later I was awakened to fall out for a gas drill and a demonstration of incendiary grenades and smoke pots. Some pass!

Again on the 28th I took a pass, this time to Omaha via bus. I arrived in the late afternoon and was unable to get a line for a call home. Because of the shift I was on my pass was actually for about thirty hours, so I got a room in a pleasant downtown hotel for all of \$ 2.00! It was a nice change to have a comfortable room all to myself without the constant noise and congestion of an Army barracks. I went to a couple movies and returned to the base the next morning by bus.

Winter was rapidly coming to Nebraska by the latter part of September and the nights were particularly cold and often windy. The wool blankets and heavy comforter felt good in our bunks. On the morning of 1 October I must have been covered over my ears because I never heard the whistle at reveille (the Air Force used whistles, not bugles) and I completely missed the early morning formation. I was, for the first time in the Army, properly chewed out by the First Sergeant. That evening the entire Squadron was confined to barracks for more overseas processing. We signed our Power of Attorney, were issued some new clothing and were supposed to have all our gear stenciled with our last name initial plus last four digits of our serial number for identification purposes. My stencil was E-2859, but I was unable to get it all done because I had to pull K.P. all night for being late that morning. I served on K.P. from 2000 to 0400. There was no heat in the mess hall that night and it was VERY cold. Afterwards I dove into my warm bunk at 0430 but was roused out at 0800 to go to work on the line. I worked all that day on just three hours of sleep and got to bed at 2300 that night. Sure enough, the very next morning I once again overslept reveille and missed the first formation. That day I was in charge of the .45 pistol range in the morning and the skeet range in the afternoon, processing flight crews, who had to qualify on both ranges before going overseas. That evening, as punishment for oversleeping, I had to clean up the offices of the C.O. and the Sqdn. Adjutant, but that turned out to be a rather easy detail which I finished in about an hour. It was the last time I overslept reveille!

The armorers, because of their training, were responsible for operation of the pistol, skeet, sub-machine gun and carbine firing ranges on a rotation basis. For the next several days that was my assignment. It was not bad work and I had the opportunity to do a lot of firing myself. I had already qualified as Sharpshooter with pistol, rifle and Thompson sub-machine gun and as Expert with the carbine. The skeet range, however, got the better of me. Although it appeared easy, I never became a good shot at skeet, much to my dismay.

We also had a special skeet range where a Martin upper turret had been mounted with two Browning automatic shotguns installed for gunnery practice. That one was really tough - very few gunners fired well with that outfit. In general, I enjoyed working at the firing ranges, except for one bad experience. By the time most of the air crews had qualified on the pistol range I still had one first pilot who just couldn't make it. I had already flunked him at least five times and he was getting pretty upset about it. Finally, when he came within eight points of qualifying, he tried to "pull rank" on me by directing me to sign his papers. I bluntly refused to do so and I don't think he ever qualified before going overseas.

By the first week of October our Squadron had eight planes, of which two were what we called "flyaways". These were "H" model B-24s which would be our first actual combat aircraft. They had the new Emerson nose turrets installed, which were so new that we had not heard of or studied them in armament school. Thus I spent a lot of time learning all I could about this new equipment. Our first "H" model was 102, (we designated individual planes by the last three digits of their serial, or tail, numbers) which would later be named "Cannon Fodder" and was destined to crash on takeoff in Italy the following summer.

At this point in my narrative, a brief discussion of B-24 armament might prove of interest. This aircraft mounted ten Caliber 50 Browning machine guns, eight in power turrets and two in the waist which were manually operated, firing out of the open waist windows. The Emerson nose turret was electrically driven in azimuth and elevation by variable-speed D.C. motors. The guns were mounted side-by-side, charged (i.e. loaded) by hand with long levers and fired electrically by solenoids. There was an optical gun sight which projected a lighted circle with "bull's eye" on the target. The operator controlled the turret in azimuth and elevation with a hand-controller which also mounted the firing switch. As with all turrets, each gun had its own ammunition box in which the belted cartridges were stored in loops and fed to the gun through flexible chutes. Because of the weight of the ammunition each gun had a booster motor mounted near the breech which pulled the ammo belt from the chute and storage box. The ammo "belt" was formed of interlocking steel links. When the guns were fired the ejected cases and links were either jettisoned overboard or collected in special containers to be emptied later.

The upper turret was made by Martin and was electrically driven through amplidyne units. These were motor-driven D.C. generators which through special windings provided accurate control of the high output power via the low-current input signals from the turret controller. They emitted a high-pitched howl when in operation. The seat of the Martin turret was hinged and dropped down so that the gunner could pull himself up into position and then latch the seat under him. His feet rested in a special support. This turret was difficult to enter or leave, especially when one was wearing heavy winter flying clothing, parachute harness and flak vest. Since this turret could be moved a full 360 degrees in azimuth and more than 180 degrees in elevation, it incorporated special fire-interrupter cams which prevented the guns from firing into the props, wing tips and rudders.

The lower turret was a Sperry ball turret mounted on the underside of the plane just aft of the bomb bay. It was the same as the B-17 lower turret, except for a critical difference. Because the B-24 had a tri-cycle landing gear and thus sat very close to the ground, a rigid B-17 type of mount was not possible. Instead, the turret was designed to be retractable and thus was recessed almost completely into the fuselage. To lower it in flight one opened a valve in the hydraulic lift mechanism and the turret slowly lowered to its "fighting" position. To enter the turret then, one manually cranked it down in elevation until the guns pointed straight down - this rotated the door up so that the gunner could unlatch it and enter the turret. The procedure was reversed to exit the turret, then the gun barrels were manually rotated to a horizontal position and pointed directly aft and the turret was retracted into the ship using a manually-operated hydraulic pump. As a consequence, this turret was very difficult to service on the ground and it was quite impossible to test it by actual operation, except when the plane was in the air. In the air it was a comfortable turret to operate (the gunner was in a reclining position with his back resting against the door) but was rather confining. The turret was powered by a unique electric/hydraulic system. Constant-speed electric motors drove variable-displacement Vickers hydraulic pumps which, in turn, moved the turret by hydraulic controllers. Fortunately for those of us who had to service it, the Sperry Turret was the most reliable system on the plane.

The tail turret, where "Tail-end Charlie" resided, was made by Consolidated Vultee, the designer of the B-24. It incorporated a completely hydraulic power system, with a big hydraulic pump, pressure accumulator and associated plumbing and valves. When in operation it screamed like a banshee and tended to be less smooth in motion than the electrically-powered turrets. A leak or piece of flak in the right place would result in the entire rear of the plane being drenched in hydraulic fluid. The gunner was protected by sheets of armorplate on either side and a large rectangular piece of bullet-proof glass in front of him, which moved up and down in elevation with the guns. It was a lonely location to fly in combat.

As noted earlier, there were also two flexible guns mounted on pivots at either side of the waist of the plane, which were fired out of side windows. It was a very simple arrangement, with ring-and-post sights and gravity fed ammo belts. These guns spewed their spent shell cases and links all over the waist area when they were fired.

The B-24 bomb bay was located directly under the wing. There were two doors on each side which were of a unique "roller shutter" design. When opened on the ground or in the air for bombing, these doors just rolled up and retracted into the fuselage, rather than swinging open on hinges, as on the B-17. This resulted in far less air drag and buffeting in flight. The bomb bay was divided in the center by the main fuselage keel-beam, which also served as a catwalk for personnel access between the forward and tail sections of the plane. Two bomb racks were mounted fore and aft on each side on the bay, mounted to the keel-beam and the dorsal support beam. Each rack had five bomb-shackle positions, for a total of twenty possible bomb positions. All bombs were designed with two mounting lugs welded to the case

about two feet apart. A bomb shackle, which incorporated two large, rotating hooks, was attached to the two lugs on the bomb and, after hoisting the bomb and shackle into the bay the shackle was attached to two big snap-hooks on the rack at the proper position. The shackle had two operating levers at the top which fitted into separate release mechanisms on the bomb rack. One release unit was operated electrically by the intervalometer connected to the Norden bombsight. The second release mechanism was entirely mechanical in operation. All the mechanical releases were connected together through a linkage system to a "salvo" lever beside the Bombardier's position. When he pulled on this lever all the bombs in the bay were released simultaneously. The normal purpose of this "salvo" option was to permit the Bombardier to release his full bomb load in a "safe" (i.e. unarmed) condition in the case of an emergency, such as loss of an engine during takeoff. However, as we shall see, bombs were also frequently salvoed armed in combat. During normal bombing the Bombardier actually took over control of the aircraft, through the Norden bombsight, at the Initial Point (I.P.) and controlled altitude and direction until the analog computer in the bombsight released the bomb load at the Aim Point, (A.P.). The bombsight sent a signal to the intervalometer which then sent the actual "drop" signals to the releases on the bomb racks. The intervalometer was simply a box containing a relay for each bomb station, and a timer which was pre-set for a specified time interval between the release of each bomb. Bombs were dropped in a sequence (port-starboard & fore-aft) which would maintain the trim of the plane and, of course, bombs were released in a bottom-to-top sequence.

We worked very hard at Fairmont A.F.B. as the planes flew on training missions every day, weather permitting. There was, of course, the periodic guard duty, detail and K.P. which all enlisted men, under the rank of Sergeant, had to put up with. About the middle of October one plane from the Group (not our Squadron) exploded in mid-air for some unknown reason and all six aboard were killed. The weather continued to get worse - colder and with frequent rain. Our base, being new and without any grass cover, turned to a sea of mud, especially around the barracks and mess areas. We were constantly cleaning our boots, clothing and living quarters. It was particularly cold and miserable working on the line on night shift. We were issued wool caps and fleece-lined pants and jackets, which were very welcome.

Preparations for overseas duty continued. Each man was issued a steel helmet, firearm, dog-tag chain, cartridge belt and ammo clips. I was issued a Thompson sub-machine gun at first but quickly exchanged it for a carbine, because I didn't want to lug all that weight! We were given clothing check lists and from the heavy winter equipment we were being issued we thought it likely that we would be going to Britain. We had a number of physical fitness tests, including chinning, pushups and 300 yard dashes. At a "show-down inspection" in late October all of our gear was checked for proper size and condition. Anything that was even slightly worn was turned in for salvage and replaced with new like items. Dog tags, shot records and pay records were all carefully checked. We stood retreat in full equipment, with packs and steel helmets and there were lectures on personal security and censorship. Time was moving quickly.

The weather had become so bad that I no longer took a pass into town. In my spare time I went to the Base Theater, Service Club or P.X. I wrote at least one letter every day either home or to relatives. In return, Mother wrote to me every day, without fail. She also sent a package of either cupcakes or cookies once a week. I am sure I received more letters and packages than anyone else in my group. We had a Day Room where we could relax and read, and sometimes I played dime, nickel, quarter poker with the guys. Some played for much higher stakes, but I never did, nor did I ever play craps, which was probably the most popular gambling game.

By the end of October we had received all of our "flyaway" planes, fifteen in all. Whenever a new plane arrived it meant a great deal of work for the mechanics and armorers. Every gun had to be removed, cleaned, lubricated, checked for proper headspace and timing and then reinstalled. Turrets had to be thoroughly checked out, as well as the gunsights and bomb racks. In addition, some of the planes left the factory in very poor shape. We often found faulty circuits, missing parts, and systems which simply did not operate properly. Quality control was particularly poor on those planes which were constructed at the Ford River Rouge Plant, whereas planes manufactured by Consolidated and Douglas generally arrived in good shape. Auto manufacturers have never really understood quality control. Then there were the inevitable modifications which had not been incorporated at the factory and had to be done in the field. Every ship had to be carefully inspected to make sure all the latest Tech Orders had been complied with.

NOV.

The first week of December we had a real blizzard with heavy wind-blown snow and very cold temperatures. We drew sweaters, gloves, fleece-lined flying helmets and boots, coveralls and thick, wool Mackinaws from Air Force Technical Supply. The latter organization was set up to issue only special clothing for Air Force applications, whereas our regular uniforms and other equipment were issued by the normal Army Supply organization. From the latter we now received our overseas duffel bag to replace one of our barracks bags (we kept our second barracks bag for extra clothing which would be shipped as ship's cargo), three sets of new khakis, chapsticks, and weapon cleaning kits and oil.

I had asked Essie to try to locate a Kodak folding roll-film camera for me in Cleveland for use overseas, as I did not want to take my Argus, and thought I could obtain ordinary roll-film easier. I knew it would be hard to find one, as cameras were no longer being made during the War. Happily, on the fifth of November I received from her a Kodak Vigilant 620 with a roll of film and a Sunbeam electric shaver. I was really delighted with both. I took one roll of pictures during my last week at Fairmont A.F.B.

We had our final pre-overseas inspection on 16 November and on the 19th started packing our shop equipment, spare parts and guns for shipment. We also had to check all equipment aboard the planes to be certain that they were ready to go. All guns on the planes were given a heavy protective coating of oil. On the 19th also all passes were cancelled and we were restricted to Base.

On 20 November we went to the range and each fired 50 rounds from our new carbines to check them and sight them in. We received our last flyaway plane, a brand new "J" model on the 21st, but since all our equipment had been packed there was little we could do to check it out other than operate the turrets and oil the guns.

At this time, 21 November, we went to a standard one-shift day and most of our duty time was for lectures, drill and full-dress, full equipment formations. On the 24th we went on a seven mile hike with steel helmets and full field equipment, during which groups of six men practiced erecting pyramidal tents in a field.

The 25th of November was Thanksgiving and we received orders to be ready to move on short notice. I had waited till the last minute, almost, to send my radio home and now it was nearly too late. Our mail room was closed, so all I could do was to wrap it up and leave it with a lady who was a hostess in the E.M. Service Club. She promised to mail it for me the next day. We had a really fine Thanksgiving Dinner with turkey and all the usual side dishes. It was to be our last truly great meal for a long while. That evening we packed our musette bags and loaded a bunch of equipment on cargo trucks.

We finished packing the next morning, made up our horseshoe shaped blanket rolls (shades of 1918), scrubbed our barracks and policed our area. After a final roll call at 1500 we boarded trucks for the trip into Fairmont. There the local ladies, bless their hearts, came to the station and gave us coffee and home-made cakes and cookies. I will never forget that. This was not an organized or formal group, like the Red Cross or a service club, but just a bunch of local housewives trying to do their bit. We boarded our train - daycoaches - and left Fairmont, waving till those kind women passed from our view. During that night I had to stand guard over three prisoners from our Guard-house who would be going overseas under arrest for some infraction.

We changed to welcome Pullman cars in Chicago and I recorded that we had good meals, in spite of having a "cattle car" kitchen. Perhaps it was because by now I had become used to Army cooking! We passed through Columbus, Ohio the night of 27/28 Nov. and, assuming we were on the B & O track, we may well have passed right through Barnesville somewhat later. Late that evening we arrived at Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia and were assigned to barracks.

On 29 November we were issued new, light-weight gas masks, gas protective ointment, protective covers (simply a large plastic bag to put over oneself in the event of a mist-type gas attack), dust masks, eye shields and sulfa tablets for wounds. From the latter items I immediately decided we would be going to North Africa instead of England. It seemed logical - Naples had fallen to the Fifth Army on 1 October and that would make available the airfields of the Foggia area. We had more clothing checks, a censorship lecture, and a final opportunity to salvage items. We ate in a very large mess hall, using our mess kits, instead of the usual Army serving trays. Incredibly, early the next morning, at 0200, we were awakened in our barracks to sign the payroll!

On 30 November we were issued additional clothing, impregnated long underwear for protection against gas (by now I was sure the Army had some sort of phobia about poison gas), mosquito headnet, gloves and bar for sleeping, and four more ammunition clips. The mosquito equipment convinced me that we were headed for Italy, since malaria had always been a problem there. In moving around the camp we noted lots of Italian and German prisoners in the stockade, probably from North Africa. I wondered if they knew how lucky they were! That night I managed to get a call home to Mother and Dad to let them know we were about to leave. We packed our barracks "B" bags, which would go as ship's cargo, as well as our duffel bags, which we would carry, and made up our blanket rolls that night, expecting to leave the next morning. Instead, they roused us out at 0400 to spend the next day, 1 December on K.P.! Good old Army!

On 2 December I gave my camera and two rolls of film to Lt. Luhrs to put in his "B" bag, as the enlisted men had been told they would not be able to take any cameras with them. Officers, naturally, were exempt from such silly rules. That day I was issued a second pair of G.I. glasses and a special pair of glasses to be used inside the gas mask. After lunch we were ordered to dress in boots, socks and overcoats, ONLY, (i.e. we had nothing at all on under our coats) and we were then marched to a large hall for our final physical examination. On the way we had a riotous experience. Our heavy G.I. overcoats came well below the knees but they had a slit up the back, almost to the waist, which was normally buttoned closed. I guess this was intended to be opened up for freedom of motion when needed. Our First Sergeant, whose name was Wright, was a big, tall and rather heavy man and he was leading our march to the examination building. As we went along we passed a number of WAACS and a couple Army nurses. When we passed them they started laughing and whistling. We couldn't figure out why at first, but noticed that they kept looking back over their shoulders at the head of our column. Then we saw! First Sergeant Wright's overcoat opening was completely unbuttoned and his coat was flapping open in the high wind. And, of course, his rear end was being exposed for all the world, including WAACS and nurses, to see and enjoy. He never knew and I doubt anyone ever told him! That night we had a final lecture on shipping details and an abandon ship drill.

On 3 December we were up at 0400 again, but this time not for K.P. After cleaning the barracks, we loaded our bags on trucks and then marched to the train station. There we received a lunch bag with two cookies, two sandwiches and an orange, and then boarded the train. After a trip of about 40 minutes, we arrived at Newport News and detrained onto a long pier. There Red Cross ladies gave us hot coffee and an Army Band was present to play us off.

Each of us was carrying our fully loaded musette bag, our large duffel bag, weapon, steel helmet and blanket roll, wrapped around the pack. We carried the duffel bags on one shoulder, which made for a high and rather unstable load. As we walked towards the gangplank one of the men in the front lost his balance on his way up the gangplank and almost fell into the water. He did drop his duffel bag into the water and was only saved by the quick action of a seaman who grabbed him as he almost went through the rope. That made all of us pretty nervous!

VOYAGE TO THE WAR

We were now about to embark on our mission overseas, but what of the Group's aircraft? Actually, we in the ground crew had no knowledge at that time as to the whereabouts or routing of our planes, which we would not see again for almost seven weeks. The aircrews and planes started leaving Fairmont A.F.B. the last week of November, through the first week of December. Each plane crew was on its own - they did not fly in any sort of formation. The route they took was generally first to Miami, then down the Caribbean Island chain to South America. They then flew along the South American coast to Natal, Brazil, across the ocean to Dakar in French West Africa and finally to Constantine in Algeria. The Crew Chief for each plane flew with the air crew to provide service when needed. After they reached the field at Constantine they flew more practice missions from there until they finally joined us at our assigned base in Italy.

Our ship was a Liberty Ship constructed in April, named the S.S. JOHN S. PILLSBURY. She had two convoy trips and three enemy aircraft to her credit. The crew was Merchant Marine and there was a Navy gun crew aboard to man the armament which consisted of several 20mm anti-aircraft guns, a five-inch gun on the bow and a three-inch stern gun. The ship was 441 feet long and could carry a cargo of nearly 11,000 tons. Our ship had some deck cargo but most was in the holds.

We were assigned quarters in the No. 2 hold forward. An iron stairway led down into the hold, which was a large square area, clear in the center, with bunks lining all sides. These "bunks" were simply canvas slings mounted on a steel framework and were stacked six high to the ceiling. There could have been no more than about 18 inches between bunks and one had to climb up and swing one's body horizontally to get in. Of necessity, all of our gear was piled in the center of the hold. The floor consisted of removable hatches, under which cargo was loaded down to the ship's bottom. I cannot recall how many men were in one hold, but probably between 75 and 100. There was a rumor that we were sleeping over tons of ammunition, but no one really believed "they" would do that! We were to learn later that "they" would and did!.

There was only cold salt water for washing, and we had some "salt water soap", which was almost useless. The supply of fresh water for drinking was no problem. The officers, of course, couldn't mix with the enlisted men and the entire aft half of the ship was reserved for them. A large sign was placed in the companion way on each side of the bridge which said "Officers' Country" and we were not allowed beyond that point. No doubt they had comfortable quarters with hot water and probably ate in the ship's Officers' Mess.

Our ship left the dock at 1300 and moved out into Chesapeake Bay where we anchored. We were surrounded by scores of freighters and tankers that would be part of our convoy, which, we were told, would be the largest yet to cross the Atlantic. A Wasp-class carrier and two cruisers, one light, one heavy, moved slowly past us into open water. It was a fascinating and exciting experience for a nineteen year old kid! That night on the ship was my last in the U.S. for 18 months.

We remained at anchor in the Bay all day on 4 December. Most of us spent all of our time on deck, since the ventilation in the hold was so poor. I stood in line about an hour to get a couple candy bars at the small ship's P.X. We were served only two meals per day and they were not memorable. We finally weighed anchor at 2300, but did not move out into deep water until 0200 in the morning. It had been very foggy all day and we had seen little of the other ships.

We arose on 5 December to a sight I will never forget. There, spread out from left to right and as far back towards the horizon as I could see, was our convoy, mostly Liberties and oil tankers. Our ship was in the second row from the front and about in the middle, as far as I could tell. A navy blimp followed us out to sea for half the day, then left for land. Our escort consisted primarily of U.S. destroyers and light cruisers. We were joined in the afternoon by a number of Canadian corvettes, as well. These were so small by comparison with the larger warships and they bobbed about like corks and seemed to be always rolling, even in a mild swell. The sea this first day was choppy with a light swell and the sky was clear and blue. That night the gibbous moon turned the sea to silver and the ships beside us and to our stern loomed out clearly, though no lights showed. Occasionally we could see signal lights from escort vessels but there were no sounds other than the constant throbbing of our engines. It seemed an ideal night for a U-Boat skipper to earn his Knight's Cross!

I was one of the last group to be assigned to Hold # 2 and, as a consequence, I ended up on a top bunk, much to my disgust. However, as soon as we reached the open sea, with its constant swell, I was very glad to be on top! For within 24 hours probably more than three quarters of the men in the hold had become seasick, and many of them would remain sick for the entire voyage. When they got suddenly sick in their bunks it was the guys lower down who were "in the line of fire", so to speak. Being on top, I escaped that! However, the mess and smell in that hold was something I could never adequately describe. The efforts to clean up every day were largely in vain. After two or three days I took to sleeping on deck, in spite of the cold wind and spray. I found a spot between a couple packing crates of deck cargo and a ventilator where I could curl up in my blankets and overcoat and be fairly comfortable. To assure that I would not be washed away by a large wave, I had a piece of heavy hemp rope which I looped around my waist and then tied to a deck fitting. I also had a sharp knife to cut the rope just in case some U-Boat zeroed in on us! All this was quite against regulations, of course, but no one ever caught me.

On our second day out our Executive Officer, Major Marshall, told us we were going to Algeria and that the trip would take three weeks. Thus, my guess that we were going to Italy was correct, since we certainly wouldn't be operating against Germany from Algeria. That had to be simply the first stop. Late that afternoon we had a submarine alert. The entire convoy abruptly changed course and the Navy destroyers charged off to the south. One corvette almost disappeared in the waves. I was amazed at how quickly the destroyers turned, banking sharply as they went. So far as we could tell, nothing of any significance resulted from this alert.

Pearl Harbor Day dawned cold and windy with a very rough sea. Waves crashed over the foredeck and there was constant spray. I stood at the bow much of the day dodging waves in my raincoat and topcoat. The worst of the storm passed by evening and the sky was beautiful with a near-full moon. Even with the moon the sky was so dark that stars were very visible. The next two or three days were relatively calm with clear or only partly cloudy skies. During the day we were fascinated by the dolphins which played on our bow wake for hours on end. I remember being worried that the ship might hit one but the dolphins were far faster and more maneuverable than our plodding Liberty, which was probably doing about eight knots. I could never understand a lot of the guys who seemed to spend all their time in the hold playing blackjack or poker, without ever seeing what I thought so enjoyable.

By 10 December the small ship's P.X. was all sold out and on the same day someone stole my mess kit which I had kept on my bunk. Without the mess kit I could not eat and actually missed all my meals for the next day until a friend let me borrow his after he had eaten. The usual procedure in the Army in a case like that was to simply steal someone else's mess kit, but that was something I would never do.

The next two days continued very rough and windy. At nights I watched the moon come and go behind the rapidly moving storm clouds. The night of the twelfth some of us decided to investigate our hold after supper was over. We lifted a couple of the hatches and I, being smaller and lighter than the others, let myself be lowered onto the top of the pile of cargo. I had a small flashlight someone had located. All of the cartons and cases I could see at first contained canned foods and K & C field rations. There were cartons of canned pears and peaches and we passed one of each, along with some C rations, up to our area to be enjoyed for evening snacks. Most of us were getting rather tired of our kitchen chow. Thereafter, these evening "pantry raids" became a routine exercise and we had something different to eat almost every night! The evidence, in the form of cans and boxes, was cast overboard during the night. The following night I and another fellow made a different sort of discovery while we were searching around in the hold. Around the edges and under the mound of food boxes were what must have been hundreds of wooden crates filled with 75mm howitzer shells! We were quartered over a veritable ammunition dump!. We realized then that our lifeboat drills would be no help if a well-placed torpedo found its mark on the PILLSBURY.

We all had some natural concern about U-Boats even though ship losses in the North Atlantic were very much reduced by the end of 1943, over what they had been only eight or ten months earlier. What we did not realize at the time was that the Allies had essentially won the Battle of the Atlantic in May when Admiral Donitz recalled most of his submarines from the Atlantic because of high losses. Those great losses in the wolf-packs were the direct result of Britain's ability to read Donitz's Enigma-encoded messages to his ship's commanders. These facts, of course, I learned only long after the War from reading histories of those days.

On 14 December the Navy crew held some gunnery practice, test-firing the 20mm A.A. guns and the larger bow and stern guns. Very impressive!

Every clear night, during the period of the waning moon, I enjoyed sitting on deck watching the stars. At home Father and I had often sat in the yard to stargaze - he had taught me many of the constellations. I was especially impressed with the darkness of the sky and the consequent brilliance of the stars in the middle of the Atlantic. I noted in my journal that I observed many meteors on the night of the 14th. The following night I saw something even more dramatic - and ominous, as well. While sitting on the foredeck I suddenly heard the wail of a siren coming from an escort destroyer stationed in front of the convoy. I stood up to see what was going on and saw two destroyers charging off to the southwest at flank speed. Then way back on the horizon I could see a ruddy glow which increased steadily and reflected from the low-hanging clouds. At about the same time the entire convoy made a sharp turn to port. I watched the glow for some time, but it gradually faded as we moved away. I never learned exactly what happened that night - though, of course, I suspected that a ship in the rear of our convoy had been torpedoed. Several other fellows on deck saw the event also. The next morning I asked several of the merchant seamen about it, but they claimed to know nothing. A sailor from the Navy gun crew gave me the same response. We had noted earlier that the ship's crew was very close-mouthed and seldom discussed more than the weather with the G.I.s. I suspect that they were under instructions never to discuss convoy matters with their military passengers.

It continued to be windy, with a very rough sea. There was another gun practice on the 15th and on the 17th we had a submarine alert. That same day we were ordered to wear our steel helmets at all times while on deck, along with our life jackets, as usual. On the 18th I recorded that the water was unusually phosphorescent in the bow wake. On the 19th the convoy slowed its speed significantly and many of the ships shifted their relative positions. Ours ended up in the southernmost column some distance back from the leading row of ships. That afternoon I saw the first gulls wheeling over the ships and knew we were close to Africa. It was very dark and cold that night with the stars again brilliant - I searched the horizon for lights, in vain.

On the morning of 20 December there were many gulls in the air and at noon we first sighted a faint outline of mountains on the eastern horizon. Africa, at last! It seemed that we moved very little all that day as the coast never appeared to get appreciably closer. We passed through the Strait of Gibraltar early in the morning of the 21st. I was on deck, as usual, and, peering into the darkness, I could see some scattered lights on the African side, but I could catch no glimpse of the rock itself. We sailed along the African coast all day and could see only mountain ranges which loomed dimly on the horizon. That night we anchored somewhere off-shore and could see what appeared to be lighted buoys near the coast.

On 22 December we remained anchored all day outside of the breakwater at Oran. It was a truly spectacular view - one which is still sharp and clear in my memory to this day. The Mediterranean Sea was a beautiful blue-green color with a frosting of whitecaps. The buildings of the city were a brilliant white against the blue sky. To the east of the city steep cliffs rose to what appeared to be a high escarp-

ment, while to the west rose a rather rugged and high mountain with some sort of building at the summit. A ship's rumor had it that we would not land at Oran, but would go on to Sicily.

However, on the morning of the 23rd we moved into the easternmost harbor of Oran and were berthed to a wharf by two tugs. There were several warships in the harbor, including a French battleship, three torpedoed ships in drydock and the beached half of a tanker. While waiting to leave the ship, we threw candy and cigarettes to natives who were working on coal barges nearby. About noon we disembarked and were taken by truck convoy through Oran to a staging area about 12 kilometers from the city. The ride through the city was something of a shock. Instead of the clean, bright and beautiful image it presented to us while anchored off-shore, the city was quite dirty and gave off an aroma which I could never adequately describe! It was fascinating, however, with crowds of people representing probably a score of nationalities and uniformed men from virtually every Allied nation and colonial outpost.

At our staging area we were assigned to large pyramidal tents on a hillside which overlooked a beautiful valley. There were Arabs wandering about everywhere, many of them herding goats. Ever after we referred to this rather miserable place as "Goat Hill". We were issued G.I. cots and two extra blankets. Since we already had two blankets per man, we could not understand the issue of extra blankets until later that night when the desert cold settled upon us. It was really frigid and we spent a miserable night - I recorded in my journal that I could have used six blankets! It rained all day on the 24th and the entire area turned into a sea of sticky mud. That night was a Christmas Eve to be remembered. We huddled around an open wood fire in our overcoats and raincoats, wet, cold and miserable, while we heated "C" ration stew and beans over the fire and sang Christmas carols. I am sure there wasn't a man there who didn't think of family and home, with a lump in his throat.

On Christmas we had no formations and a number of men went into a local village, St. Luis, to buy wine. Many of them were more used to beer than wine, with the result that there were a bunch of sick, drunk soldiers by evening. During the day we noticed a lot of Arabs wearing curious white robes. It turned out that these were G.I. muslin mattress covers which soldiers had sold to the Arabs for the equivalent of ten or fifteen dollars. The new owners cut arm and head holes in the covers and wore them like desert sheiks - it was a strange and wondrous sight! We had turkey for supper on Christmas, but it was not a great meal, as the cooks had to work over an open field kitchen in the rain and the food was soggy and cold by the time we got it. That night I had to serve on guard duty from 2000 to 2200 and from 0200 to 0400 the next morning. We had to watch the Arabs very closely, especially at night, as they would steal anything they could carry off. Fortunately, just pointing a carbine at them would send them scurrying off and there was never a need to fire at them. On 26 December we were told that we would depart on a three day voyage the following day - obviously to Italy, though we were not told our destination. We spent most of that day and evening packing our gear.

The morning of 27 December we were up at 0400, packed our blanket rolls and packs, turned in our extra blankets and cots and left on trucks at 1000. We again drove through Oran but this time we passed through a long tunnel in the mountain which rose immediately to the west of the city and entered the western part of the harbor which, it turned out, was operated by the British. We got off the trucks at a motor pool and had to walk about three kilometers to our ship. We passed by the French battleship Lorrain which, I remember, had curious gun mounts in the side of the hull, as well as in the usual deck turrets. One sight I still remember was of a French sailor walking along the wharf with a long loaf of French bread under each arm. The bread was not protected by any sort of wrapping and was probably fresh from some bakery.

Our new ship was a Dutchman, the "Johann DeWitt", a two-stacker of perhaps 12 to 15 thousand tons. She must have been a passenger liner on the Atlantic run before the war. We shared the ship with a group of Combat M.P.'s, some infantry troops and about half of the 449th Bomb Group. The ship was very crowded. Our group was assigned to hold E-5 where we would sleep in hammocks which were rolled up and stowed during the day to make more room. That evening we were detailed to carry our extra duffel bags and all the officers' bags from the dock, where they had been dumped, onto the ship, where we tossed them into a deep hold amidships.

We left our dock early on the 28th and anchored in the harbor until our convoy could form up. The convoy consisted only of four large troopships (all former liners), two of which were towing barrage balloons, and a fairly large escort of British destroyers and corvettes. There were no freighters or tankers in the group. We left Oran harbor about noon and sailed along the coast of Africa all day. As soon as I could I started exploring the DeWitt. She was very large, compared with the Pillsbury and even had a barbershop. The crew were all Dutch and Dutch money was used to pay for any services. I still have some Dutch coins from that trip! There was also a British Army contingent aboard the ship and we learned that they were there to prevent the Dutchmen from trying to run the ship into a port in the Netherlands in an attempt to rescue fellow citizens from the German occupation. The British, of course, did not want to take the chance of losing a valuable troopship as the result of some such desperate venture. During my exploration of the ship I accidentally walked into "Officer Country" and saw the luxurious cabin accommodations and the liveried Indian flunkies who were scurrying about waiting on our fellow soldiers of higher rank and more gentlemanly demeanor.

The meals on the DeWitt were fairly good, except that we had to get used to a lot of mutton and tea. We quickly discovered that the English crackers we were served were well populated with weevils and so we fed these to the Mediterranean fish.

On 29 December we passed Bizerte in the afternoon and then turned from the coast towards Sicily. During the late evening we passed Palermo and could see searchlights and tracer shells coursing across the sky, apparently in search of some German intruders. The following morning we were passing by coastal Italian islands and soon passed the Isle of

Capri and entered Naples harbor about noon, where we remained anchored all day. What a lovely view, in spite of the gray, misty day! The harbor was a crescent-shaped expanse of blue water with the city of Naples spread out in the center. Behind the city rose the great bulk of Vesuvius, its upper half almost totally obscured by clouds. That evening we stood on deck and watched the lights of the city, surprised that there was no blackout in effect.

Again on the 31st, we remained at anchor in the harbor all day. It was cold and raining with a strong chop in the harbor. We hauled our duffel bags from our hold onto the deck. In the evening we celebrated New Year's Eve with ginger beer from the ship's exchange. On New Year's Day the weather cleared and it was somewhat warmer. All of Mt. Vesuvius was visible, its peak covered with snow, and a curling plume of smoke drifted off with the breeze. The volcano, the city and the bay spread out before us was a glorious vision - just like the travel posters. The delay in landing, we were told, was caused by a fouled anchor chain. During the day numerous small boats, each with several people aboard, were rowed out to our ship for the purpose of begging food and cigarettes. We could see in the distance that there were at least a dozen ships sunk in the harbor near the wharf area.

After lunch on 2 January the ship weighed anchor and moved towards the dock area. Our "dock" turned out to be a ship which had been sunk and was lying on her side near the wharf. Across the ship's hull the engineers had constructed a temporary gangway to the wharf. The entire wharf area was littered with the wreckage of war and many buildings nearby were in ruins from bombings. Since the ship could not lower a gangplank we disembarked via large cargo nets over the side. It was a bit tricky with full packs, helmets and weapons. We moved to the wharf area where we left our personal gear under armed guard, then returned to the ship to unload all of our duffel and barracks bags and our TAT (To Accompany Troops) equipment.

We worked until 0100 unloading baggage and equipment. A small winch was used to remove the equipment from the hold, after which it was loaded into a large cargo net, then lowered via ship's crane to a lighter or barge that was tied alongside the ship. It was during this operation that we managed to get a bit of soldiers' revenge against a few of our officers who were particularly obnoxious. When we saw a piece of baggage which belonged to one of these fellows, we simply heaved it over the side without benefit of the cargo net. They made an awesome sound as they crashed onto the deck of the lighter! The guys on the lighter reported that after several such impacts they detected the distinctive aroma of whiskey. The breakage of those illegal bottles must have imparted a heady scent to several fancy dress uniforms! Naturally, I made certain that Lt. Luhrs' bags, one of which contained my camera, were carefully lowered via cargo net. We enjoyed a peaceful sleep aboard the DeWitt that night.

Early on 3 January we started to load all of our gear and equipment on trucks. I was assigned as a guard on one of the first trucks to leave, while the other fellows remained on the wharf to continue loading. We drove through Naples, past many bombed-out buildings, to a former orphanage in the town of Bagnoli, north of Naples.

This complex consisted of several buildings, most of which were heavily camouflaged with elaborate paintings of natural scenes, such as woods, fields, etc. It was probably done by the Italians, rather than the Germans, both of whom had used the buildings before the Allies captured Naples. The buildings were bare concrete inside, cold and damp, and not at all inviting as a place to live. The latrine was the most incredible facility I had ever seen. It was a completely barren room, long and narrow, with no fixtures of any sort. Running the full length of each wall was a tiled gutter, or channel, perhaps 18 inches wide and two-and-one-half to three feet deep. A stream of water flowed along the bottom of each channel. I assume it went directly out into the sea without any treatment. I could not but think how easy it would be to lose one's balance and fall in! Outside the building were a number of tiled sinks for washing in cold water.

Fortunately, as it turned out, we did not have to spend even a single night at this facility. After we had unloaded all of our trucks, we were told that we would be moving out that same night. More trucks arrived in the afternoon and we started reloading. We were interrupted once by an air raid alert. After supper we were issued additional ammunition and at 2300 we loaded into the trucks and the convoy started off. It was a dark, rainy and very cold night. We drove in an easterly direction on back roads, using only the blackout lights on the trucks. These were almost invisible little blue slits of light which were located in the tail and parking lights of each truck.

No more than an hour after we had left it became apparent that our truck was weaving about the road more than was justified by the terrain. Sure enough, at the first rest stop we found that our motor pool driver had already finished one bottle of wine and was working on the second. The officer in charge of our truck immediately put him under arrest and asked if any of us could drive the truck. It turned out that I was the only one who had driven one of those large 6 x 6 cargo trucks, so I got the job.

It was a miserable night. With the rain and blackout conditions it was next to impossible to see beyond the vehicle in front. In addition, the roads became extremely bad. We were driving somewhere just behind the front of the Fifth and Eighth Armies, as I could hear artillery in the distance and see occasional flashes against the mountains. The roads in places were so muddy and soft that we had to use low range and all-wheel drive. There was bomb or shell damage in many places and the repair work had been hasty. We crossed a couple mountain ranges and the road in places was nothing more than a trail. Once the lead driver must have departed from our planned route and we were redirected by the combat Military Police. I not only did not know the route but I did not even know our destination, so I didn't dare lose sight of the truck ahead.

We drove all day, 4 January, through rather picturesque farming country. Some of the towns we passed through had been badly bombed and shelled. All were poor and shabby and had the same depressing appearance. For meals we ate cold C and K rations along the way at rest stops. About noon we passed through Foggia where we picked up new drivers. Finally at midnight, after being on the road over 24 hours,

we reached our destination, a little crossroads town called Gioia del Colle. Its location is at the very upper part of the "heel" of Italy's "boot", almost due south of the port city of Bari. It was cold and raining hard when we arrived. In the darkness we had no idea where we were except that we could see that we were parked in a sea of deep mud. We had no choice but to get what sleep we could sitting up in the trucks.

It was still raining the next morning - one of the coldest, wettest and most dreary days I have ever known. Our kitchen equipment had become lost in the move and we had to eat with the 724th Squadron, all of us sweating out the very long chow lines. We found we were located at a former Italian, and later German, airfield which was now being used by an R.A.F. Hurricane fighter squadron. In the afternoon we started to set up our tents on a very muddy slope. It was an impossible situation. Our tent pegs were missing and we had no hand tools at all. Our Executive Officer, Maj. Marshall, took one look at the mess we were in and told us to wait while he scouted for a better tent area in a Jeep. It was just about dark when he returned and led us to a far better site. He had found a former German barracks area where there were three dilapidated wood buildings, some stone huts and several unfinished stone barracks. Though there were no windows in the wood buildings and no roofs on the stone barracks, all had stone floors and the place looked like the Waldorf to us! Maj. Marshall was a stern and gruff officer but he did his best to take care of his troops. Searching for this tent site caused us all to miss supper that night and we went to sleep hungry and in the rain, lying on the stone floors of the old barracks, sheltered only by our raincoats. For some reason the Army never issued ponchos to troops in World War II, and a simple rain coat wasn't much help under such conditions. But at least we weren't sleeping in the mud, as were the Fifth and Eighth Army troops at the front.

For the next three days we all worked on squadron details getting equipment unloaded, setting up a mess tent (though our kitchen equipment was still missing), and an orderly room tent and other necessary chores. It was difficult, cold and muddy work, but no one complained, as we had to get our camp area set up and organized. In our spare time we started to set up our living tents inside of the unfinished stone barracks. We were still sleeping on the ground in the open.

On Sunday, 9 January, our Armament Section had to pull 24 hour guard duty, but we managed to move into the three tents we had set up that evening. There were nine men to a tent. On the 10th we finished the mess tent and began to spread gravel around the area to make walk-ways through the mud. We had supper in our own mess that night. It got dark at 1800 and since we had no lights at all there was nothing much to do in the evening except crawl into our tents, out of the weather.

The weather cleared on the 11th and we got one more tent set up so we would be less crowded. Maj. Marshall flew to Algiers that day to confer with our Group Commander, Col. Eaton. It continued very cold, with nighttime temperatures in the 20's.

I recorded 13 January as a Red Letter Day in my journal. Our P.X. was opened, we were issued straw for our mattress covers to make the ground feel a bit better, I was paid 4577 Lira in invasion currency (the exchange was one lira = one cent), and finally at our first mail call, I received 29 letters and four packages, one of which contained two rolls of film. That evening I went to a movie at the Service Club in Gioia.

On the 14th I was on guard duty in the morning. We were told that we had to be all ready for arrival of the air echelon within 48 hours. All of us were on some sort of squadron duty doing our best to get the camp and line areas in order. I was on a crew that had to construct the latrine. We dug a pit three feet square at the top, five feet square at the bottom and about ten feet deep. Over it we constructed a rather substantial "two-holer" structure with the usual half-moon cutout in the door. Wiring was strung to all the tents but as yet our portable generator had not been located among all the unopened crates.

The weather continued to be terrible. We had rain, snow and sleet all intermixed from day to day and the mud was beyond description. It turned out that the winter of 43/44 was the worst in Italy in over forty years, and it was particularly bitter for the troops at the front, fighting over some of the most difficult terrain in Europe. At first the only warmth we had was from open wood fires made from the packing crates in which our equipment was shipped. That soon ran out and there was no other wood available anywhere near our field. I don't know who came up with the idea, but sometime during our stay at Gioia del Colle we began to construct stoves for our tents which burned not wood but 100 octane aviation gasoline! We took 50 gallon oil drums and cut them in half with a torch. A circular hole was then cut in the closed end for a stove pipe which was cobbled together from pieces of scrap aluminum and food cans. The pipe extended through an opening in the top of the tent. The burner was made of a piece of ordinary one-inch iron pipe, about eight inches long, one end of which was hammered and welded closed. A long copper tube, brazed to the other end of the burner, was run outside the tent where it was brazed to a smaller steel drum mounted on a wood support, which served as the fuel tank. A shut-off petcock was installed in the fuel line and five or six very tiny holes were then drilled through the burner tube on the top side. To operate the stove a small amount of fuel was allowed to run into the stove where it was ignited to pre-heat the burner. This was the critical time - if too much fuel ran in we risked a mini-explosion, not to mention the possibility of burning a tent down, which did happen on a couple occasions. If the priming fuel was insufficient the burner would not be heated enough to vaporize the fuel and the entire operation had to be repeated. After pre-heating the burner, the valve was just cracked open to allow a small flow of gasoline. The hot iron burner pipe vaporized the incoming fuel and a hot, pale blue flame was emitted from each of the small holes in the burner, much like a Coleman camp stove. When these improvised stoves were made and operated properly, they really worked beautifully and kept the tents cozy warm during those bitter winter evenings. We never operated them during the night, for safety reasons.

Strangely, the Air Force never offered any objection to the use of these unauthorized, non-G.I. stoves or to the use of the thousands of

gallons of high test aviation fuel which must have been consumed in them over a two-year period. And, of course, every drop of this fuel had to be transported across the Atlantic by tankers, with the ever-present risk to ships and lives. In those days most Americans seemed to think that we had access to an infinite supply of all natural resources.

Another example of the profligate use of gasoline by Americans was in the washing of planes which I observed at Gioia. All aircraft engines used in World War II tended to spew out varying amounts of oil during flight. Some of this oil naturally ended up on the wings and fuselage and, in time, would build up a heavy residue which posed a potential fire hazard when an engine backfired. Thus, it was necessary to clean this oil residue off the plane surfaces on a regular basis. When the British and New Zealand ground crews cleaned their Hurricane fighters they got a small quantity of 80 octane vehicle gasoline - NOT 100 octane aviation fuel - in a can and washed their planes down by hand with a rag. However, when our mechanics washed down B-24's they simply drew bucketfuls of 100 octane fuel from drainage petcocks on the plane and literally sloshed it on the plane with smaller cans. It was not only extremely wasteful but didn't even clean as well as the method of our British cousins, who had not been reared in a land of plenty.

On Sunday the 16th there was a U.S.O. show in a hangar at the field. In general, we had only second or third rate U.S.O. shows in Italy - we never saw any first line entertainers such as Bob Hope, or other Hollywood luminaries. Usually we had shows put on by a bunch of vaudeville has-beens. But this show was different and I shall always remember it as the night Ella Logan sang to us. She sang her heart out on a makeshift stage with a small band, wearing a pretty summer dress to boost our spirits. But as she sang we could all see that she was shivering in the sub-freezing temperature. Finally one of the fellows up front dashed up on the stage and put his fleece lined leather jacket around her. Then, between numbers, one of our cooks ran out and brought back a hot cup of tea for her. Before her next song we saw her dab away tears from her face. It was a memorable evening.

On 18 January I and a buddy, Bob Keup, had a pass and went into Bari, hitching rides on British trucks. We went to the P.X. and Red Cross Service Club where we got a shave, haircut and shampoo for 35 cents. What a luxury! We had hoped they might have a shower, as none of us had had a bath of any sort since 3 December, but no luck. This large port city was in a sorry state; shabby, smelly, people in rags and not a thing for sale in any of the shops except for cheap red wine. We met and walked around with a soldier from New Zealand who had fought with the Eighth Army across North Africa and had been away from his home for nearly three years. He had only more fighting to look forward to in Italy, with no end in sight.

Squadron detail work continued on the 19th and on the 20th we welcomed our planes - all 62 of them - which arrived from Algeria. Now, at last, we could begin to do the work for which we had been trained. Work which would be hard and deadly, both for our people and for the soldiers and civilians who would suffer under our forthcoming attacks.